FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is to encourage and support a spiritual orientation to life, to promote the practice of prayer, meditation, and service to others, and to help bring about a deeper spirit of unity among humankind.

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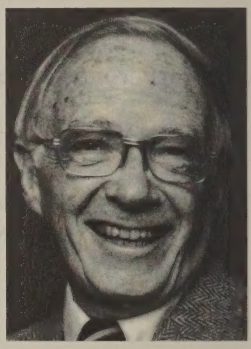
Cover photo by Eryk Hanut. A wooden (mango wood) statue of Our Lady--from India Collection of E. Hanut and A. Harvey



What I remember most about Christmas when I was growing up was the joyousness of the season: the richness and abundance of good cheer and good food, the excitement of gifts given and received, the fun of decorating the tree on Christmas Eve, and the numinous beauty of Midnight Mass at the church of St. Vincent Ferrer on Lexington Avenue and 66th Street in Manhattan.

While I didn't understand much of the symbolic meaning of the Mass, I felt its magic; felt the power and the glory of the spiritual energy flowing around and through me in the choreography, in the soaring music of the organ and choir, in the chanting of the priests, and in the responses of the congregation, transformed by the mystery being enacted in front of us. It wasn't until I was older that I would understand that I was watching an ages-old drama ritually praising and giving thanks for the miracle of the light blazing forth into the darkness.

On Christmas day, Grandma, Mother, and the aunts were busy in the kitchen, rich with the wonderful fragrance of roast beef (the outside piece for me, please!) and a seemingly endless stream of food, climaxing with home-made fruit cake that would be flamed with brandy in the darkened dining room, to the "oohs" and "aahs" of all present.

Meanwhile, brother John and I would be busy wrapping our presents for the grown-ups (usually bought at the last minute and more appealing to us than to them) while Dad, who was prone to confuse spirits with the Spirit, was yet to put in an appearance.

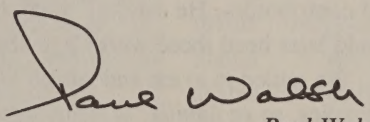
In memory, Christmas--the whole holiday season--was a joyous, happy time. And long after the tree was thrown out and the ornaments packed away for another year, and after the daily routine of our world was reestablished in the snow and cold of the new year, the sense

lingered that something far more important had happened than appeared on the surface.

The Light of Life Abundant had burned brightly in the darkest time of the year, and a joyful and peaceful place of refuge had been illuminated at the core of my being. It was to be obscured much of the time by clouds of unknowing, obscurations, and negativity. Nonetheless, this place of refuge would serve, time and again, as a sanctuary in which I would be healed and guided by the love, compassion, and wisdom flowing to and through me from the Divine Source and its manifestation in those significant others whose compassion and loving kindness helped show me the way out of the dark wood in which I often lost my way.

As I write this, December 25 is still a ways off. In thinking of Christmases past, however, I remember that as a spiritual being who is kin to every other being in the world, each of us has the gift of helping others to be happy and free from suffering by radiating out into the darkness of the world the light of loving kindness.

May you receive and send that precious gift this holiday season and every day of 1997.



Paul Walsh

My husband came home waving a fax in his hand and said, in effect, "Guess who is coming to dinner?"

Henri Nouwen, a former professor and longtime friend, wanted to reconnect now that we lived in the East. He had said by phone, "I'm not interested in seeing buildings, but I am interested in seeing you." Over the course of a decade our paths had crossed with this kind soul whose proficiency and profundity, as the author of dozens of books on the spiritual life, never seemed to alter his humility and commitment to live simply in the present moment. When we married he sent us an icon of Jesus. When each of our daughters was born, he sent an angel to hang on our Christmas tree.

So the night came. Henri arrived late and flustered. Unfamiliar roads and vague directions had left him circling and re-circling our street. As he collected his thoughts, I handed him a copy of *Fellowship in Prayer*. He was familiar with it and with a number of our advisors and contributors. He said, "If I can be of help to you, let me know." I would later heed those words and request an interview.

We settled in to eat and talk. It was the opening night of the Atlanta Olympics, so *en famille*, at Henri's request, we gathered around our tiny television to watch the extravaganza. During a commercial, my four-year-old asked me the question she had repeated for months, when she saw a Manhattan skyscraper or a wide-open yard, "How big is God?" My answers did not satisfy, so I said, "Ask Henri." And she did.

He replied, "God is as big as your heart." She persisted, "And how big is my heart?" He smiled and gestured with his large hands, "Your heart is big enough to contain the whole world."

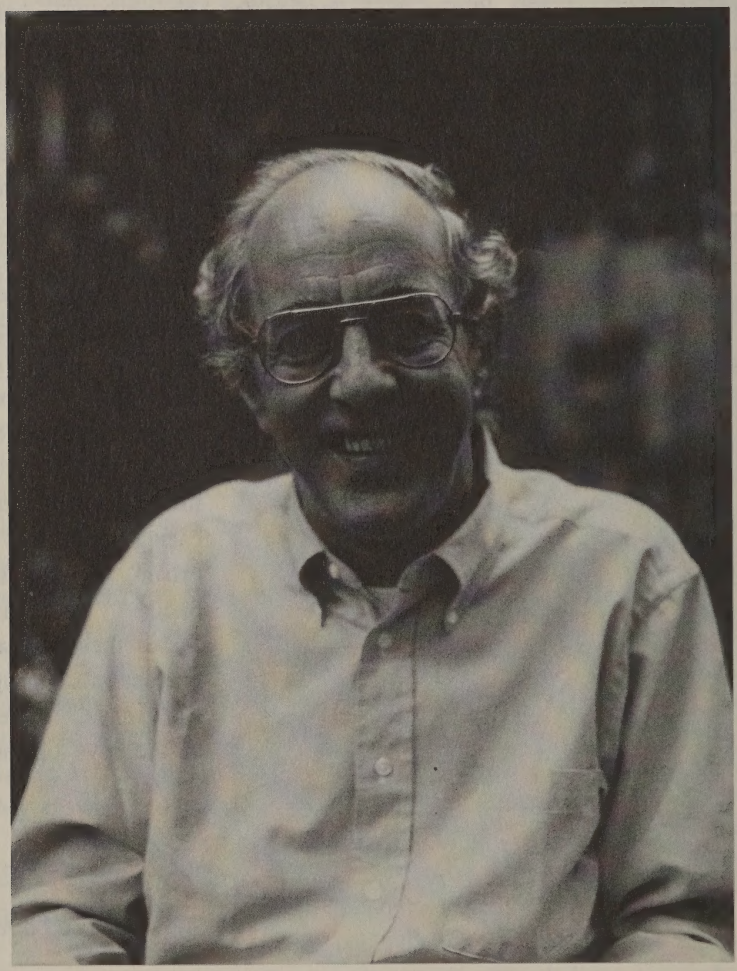
It was a good answer complete with hand motions. We've repeated it in our household over the ensuing months. This holiday season I

remember Henri's answer. Emmanuel, God-with-us, abides in us so that we may open our hearts to others.

This open-hearted message resounds through the conversation on prayer I had with Henri weeks after our dinner, and in "The Beloved Prayer," the guided prayer offered by Arthur LeClair. Joyce Davidson, sent by *Fellowship in Prayer* to *A Passion for Life* conference held earlier this year in Minneapolis, samples the wisdom shared there by several spiritual leaders. Ghandi, who gave his life for peace, writes an atypical Christmas meditation, "What Jesus Means to Me." "Illuminations" and Anita Wheatcroft's "Transforming Experience" focus on holiday themes of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and Bethlehem, the place of Jesus' coming. A real-life good Samaritan shows R. Bruce McPherson the meaning of caring for one's urban neighbors. Sheila Morgan shares the spiritual practice of savoring snow days. Revel in the joys of the season.

Rebecca Laird

Parting Words: A Conversation on Prayer with Henri Nouwen



Neil McDonough

Once we have come to the deep inner knowledge--a knowledge more of the heart than of the mind--that we are born out of love and will die into love, that every part of our being is deeply rooted in love and that this love is our true Father and Mother, then all forms of evil, illness, and death lose their final power over us and become painful but hopeful reminders of our true divine childhood. The apostle Paul expressed this experience of the complete freedom of the children of God when he wrote, "I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God known to us in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:38-39).*

In this issue we honor Henri Nouwen--
one of God's beloved.
1932-1996

**From* The Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring. *HarperSanFrancisco, 1994, 17.*

Henri Nouwen was a priest for nearly forty years. He wrote more than thirty books on the spiritual life, taught at the University of Notre Dame and Harvard and Yale Divinity Schools, and served as pastor of L'Arche Daybreak Community in Toronto, an interfaith residential community for the mentally disabled. In August of this year while Henri was completing a sabbatical year in northern New Jersey, he responded to my request for an interview by inviting me and my husband for morning prayers--Henri practiced a personal discipline of celebrating the Eucharist whenever he could. When we arrived at the converted barn that served as a wonderful place of retreat, we joined more than two dozen neighbors in morning prayers. Henri had a gift for creating community wherever he traveled. Afterwards, we talked for a couple of hours. Henri spoke profoundly of the core elements of the spiritual life: prayer, community, and ministry. He also allowed us to see his humanity. I share his thoughts with you with joy--for Henri was full of life and fervor when we talked. He spoke passionately and gestured freely. He wanted you--our readers--to be encouraged in the practice of prayer. Unexpectedly, Henri died of heart failure on September 21, 1996. We didn't know it then, but this would be one of his final gifts to us. We are supremely grateful to share some of his parting words of wisdom with you.

In *Here and Now* you write, "Prayer is the discipline of listening to that voice of love." What can you tell our readers about Where do I begin? How do I learn to listen to that voice of love?

Let me say a few things systematically about prayer. A biblical text that has been very, very important for me is the story in Luke 1:12-19 where Jesus spent the night in prayer on the top of the mountain. In the morning, he came down and created a community of apostles around him. Then in the afternoon, with his apostles, he ministered--he went out and healed and proclaimed the good news. I've been fascinated by

that because it basically says, prayer at night, community in the morning, ministry in the afternoon. Now night, morning, and afternoon are symbols for the vision that Jesus starts. The three areas we have to consciously focus on are: one, communion with God--prayer--or being in solitude with God; secondly, creating community; and thirdly, ministry.

On Prayer

What is prayer? That is what you have to start with. I very much believe that the core moment of Jesus' public life was the baptism in the Jordan, when Jesus heard the affirmation, "You are my beloved on whom my favor rests." That is the core experience of Jesus. He is reminded in a deep, deep way of who he is. The temptations in the desert are temptations to move him away from that spiritual identity. He was tempted to believe he was someone else--*You are the one who can turn stone into bread. You are the one who can jump from the temple. You are the one who can make others bow to your power.* Jesus said, "No, no, no. I am the beloved from God." I think his whole life is continually claiming that identity in the midst of everything. There are times in which he is praised, times when he is despised or rejected, but he keeps saying, *Others will leave me alone, but my Father will not leave me alone. I am the beloved son of God. I am the hope found in that identity.*

Prayer, then, is listening to that voice--to the one who calls you the beloved. It is to constantly go back to the truth of who we are and claim it for ourselves. I'm not what I do. I'm not what people say about me. I'm not what I have. Although, there is nothing wrong with success, there is nothing wrong with popularity, there is nothing wrong with being powerful. But finally, my spiritual identity is not rooted in the world--the things the world gives me. My life is rooted in my spiritual identity. Whatever we do--we have to go back regularly to that place of core identity.

Prayer is listening. I've said often that it is listening with obedience--listening with attention. Jesus listens with obedience to the Father--he keeps listening to the Father's affirmation. Now it is interesting that Jesus listens in the night (night means symbolically that when this listening happens it does not always satisfy the senses). Night might mean I can't feel that I'm the beloved. I'm not experiencing that in my flesh, but I know that I'm the beloved. Prayer doesn't mean that you have loving, tender feelings as you listen to God's voice. Sometimes, yes, but sometimes no. Prayer is a discipline. You go back to the place of solitude with God and claim who you are. You let that voice speak in you, but that doesn't mean that a little, tiny voice whispers in your ear. The voice of prayer is spiritual.

That is why prayer requires discipline. Discipline means to create boundaries around our meeting with God. Our times and places can't be so filled up that there is no way of meeting. So you have to work very hard to say this is the time in which I am with God, whether I like it or not, whether I feel like it, whether it satisfies me. It is very interesting that people who follow a prayer discipline for ten minutes a day or so, when they keep doing it regularly, eventually, they don't want to miss it--even though it doesn't satisfy right away on the level of the flesh. They may be distracted throughout the whole ten minutes, but they keep going back to it. They say that: something is happening to me on a deeper level than my thinking. I don't have wonderful thoughts when I pray nor do I have wonderful feelings when I pray, but God is greater than my heart and my mind.

The larger mystery of prayer is greater than what I can grasp with my emotional senses or intellectual gifts. I trust that God is greater than me when I dwell--let myself be held--in that place of prayer. Eventually, when I do this I do live the very spiritual life.

On Community

Only out of that prayerful place can we hope for community. Only

when we know on some level that we are God's beloved can we start relating to other people. It's not before or later as in chronological time--but spiritually, we need to know God in order to know other people. We need to love God in order to love each other. Communion with God precedes community with people in a spiritual sense. Community is characterized by two things: one is forgiveness, the other is celebration.

Forgiveness means that I continually am willing to forgive the other person for not being God--for not fulfilling all my needs. I, too, must ask forgiveness for not being able to fulfill other people's needs. Our heart--the center of our being--is a part of God. Thus, our heart longs for satisfaction, for total communion. But human beings, whether it's your husband, or your wife, or your father, or your mother, your brother, sister, or child, they are all so limited in giving that which we crave. But since we want so much and we get only part of what we want, we have to keep on forgiving people for not giving us all we want.

So I forgive you since you can only love me in a limited way. I forgive my mother that she is not everything I would like her to be. I forgive my father. This is of enormous importance right now because constantly people look to blame their parents, the church, and their friends for not giving them what they need. So many are so angry. They cannot forgive people for offering only limited expressions of an unlimited love. God's love is unlimited but people's love is not. If you enter into any relationship in communion, friendship, marriage, community, the relationships are always riddled with frustration and disappointments. So forgiveness becomes the word for love in the human context.

The interesting thing is that when you can forgive people for not being God then you can celebrate that they are a reflection of God. You can say, "Since you are not God, I love you because you have such beautiful gifts of his love." You don't have everything of God, but what you have to offer is worth celebrating. By celebrate I mean to lift up, affirm, confirm, to rejoice in another person's gifts. You can say you are a reflection of that unlimited love. That is why community becomes

important. A husband or wife can do so much but then you need children, friends, parents. The community is in a way a mosaic in which every person is a little piece of a different color that when seen together show us the face of God. But each little piece on its own is a very limited reflection of that great love.

So celebration becomes important and can be very concrete expressions of love, like birthday celebrations that simply say, "I'm happy you are there." It doesn't mean lifting up people's talents like "You're a good piano player." I lift up your gifts of joy, peace, love, perseverance, kindness, gentleness. We lift up the gifts of the spirit--and these are the reflections of God.

As soon as you have community, you have a problem. Someone once said that, "Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives."

You're not more loveable because you can play the piano better than I can. Those are talents. I'm talking about celebrating spiritual gifts and that can happen in all sorts of ways, like meals. We celebrate, acknowledge, and express gratitude for each other's gifts around a table --which is the most communal of events (a practice that is quickly dropping out of our culture, by the way.) The meal is one of the sacred moments when we celebrate our being together.

If you look at that passage in Luke, Jesus' community is named one by one, and at the end it says, "Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." So you see, as soon as you have community, you have a problem. Someone once said that, "Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives." I mean there is always that one person. A traitor means to "hand over." It doesn't so much mean betrayal. There is always someone in the community who hands you

over to something. It's not just one person. He may be my Judas, you may be another's Judas. It's not that one person in the community is the problem, its more that different people are handing other people over to suffering all the time without even wanting to. There is always someone who doesn't satisfy my need or someone who irritates me. In every community--whether family or congregation--there is always someone who for someone else is a hair shirt, but that is essential for community. It may not be that we want it, but it is always there. It is not the sentimental life that we want community to be where everybody loves each other. That's never going to be there. People have to be trained to realize that community doesn't mean emotional, affective, total harmony. That's not even good, for we are always on the way, on the move. Imagine if community were all we want it to be, we'd never want to go anywhere. We are a people on the road.

On Ministry

In the text in Luke we see that Jesus starts community right away. He does his whole ministry with others. He sent the disciples out to heal, drive out demons, and announce his coming. From the very beginning Jesus sees his task as a ministry with others. He goes out to minister with his disciples.

The Bible says that Jesus went out and the crowds were there. So he was one with God, then together with a few people, and then the crowds came. One of the things I like to say is that if you are living in communion with God and in community with people you cannot do other than minister. Ministry is not something you do next. I have a terribly hard time with ministry as something that consists of techniques you have to apply. Ministry is the overflow of your love for God and for your fellow human beings. Someone said to me "Ministry is when two people toast their glasses of wine and something splashes over." Ministry is the extra. The question is not, “How do I bring all of these people to Jesus, or how do I make these people believe, or how do I now do the hard work of ministry?”

Ministry happens. I have done nothing here while on sabbatical to do ministry. I didn't come here to get people who mostly don't go to church to join me in prayer and the Eucharist. I just started to pray, and invited one person to join me, and these others--neighbors and friends--simply came. I'm not concerned with fixing the marriage of the one who is considering divorce or convincing the woman who doesn't believe in Jesus. I'm here to say this is who I am, and to be there for others.

Jesus never did much ministry. Jesus spoke what his heart was full of. And anybody who touched him was healed. He didn't sit people down and diagnose them, or say, "I can help you but I can't help you." People touched him and were healed. He was even wondering what was happening. You cannot other but minister if you are in communion with God and in communion with other people. People want to know where your energy comes from. They get the overflow. It's not something that requires professional credentials. Ministry isn't something you do for certain hours during the day and then you come home and relax. Who knows? Ministry might happen while you are relaxing.

On Compassion and Gratitude

Two words I think are helpful for ministry are compassion and gratitude. Ministry happens when you participate in the mystery of *being with*. The whole incarnation, God-with-us, Emmanuel, is first of all being with people. Caring means "to cry out with." Compassion literally means "to be with those who suffer." Ministry means that we lift the incarnation--we lift the God who says, "I will be with you." We are to be precisely where people are vulnerable, not to fix it or to change it. That is an unintended fruit of it, but that is not why you are there. Compassion is the priesthood of Jesus--read the letter to the Hebrews. Since nothing human was alien to him, he was the compassionate high priest. Jesus is first of all God-with-us. For thirty years he was just living in a small village, living the same life that we live. It was only for three years that he was preaching. So even when you look at it in a

spiritual way, Jesus' ministry wasn't just the three years he was preaching. The mystery is that he shared our lives. God is a God-with-us. Ministry is being with the sick, the dying, being with people wherever they are, whatever their problems. We dare to be with them in their weakness and trust that if we are entering into people's vulnerable places, we will experience immense joy. That is the mystery of ministry.

You can't solve the world's problems, but you can be with people. I've been with two people who were dying in the last months. It wasn't a burden--it was a great joy to have the privilege to be there when they made their passage.

If I follow God, I pray, I say certain things, and I tell others in need that I care. But I don't sit down beforehand and plan how to get this person from here to there. If I am not in communion with God or in community with other people, then I become a technician who got involved, but as a technician I cannot lay down my life for my friends. My life is my joy, my peace, and my sorrow. Ministry is witness. It's nothing else but saying, "I've seen something, I've experienced something, and I'm not afraid to share it with you if you ask me to." Ministry doesn't have that quality of compulsiveness that it has to happen right away or if I don't say something at the right time that person will become lost.

Ministry is about multiplication. You give away what you have --that little piece of bread in your hand--and it multiplies.

Secondly, gratitude is essential to ministry. Gratitude basically means to receive the gifts of others--to say thank you for being you. It is a central part of ministry to receive the gifts of others. Only when you yourself have experienced your own giftedness can you be free. We have a desire to get things to other people so that we can be on the

giving side. We forget that the greater joy for other people is for them to realize that they have something to give to us. I can care for handicapped people my whole life, and they need thousands of things, but the greater joy for other people is to be able to do some things themselves. When I can be excited about them, take them on a lecture tour with me and hear others say to them, "Wow, you were great!" these are gifts. When I take Bill or one of the others from L'Arche with me, it's not to show other people how much I care for them, rather I do it so they can offer something. I'm the mediator of that. I need to be there with them. They cannot give their gifts if I'm not there to make it visible.

For instance, I am leaving New Jersey soon. When I began praying here, the group said, "You're the one who knows all about prayer." Yes, I have a certain sophistication around these things, but if I stayed here longer, they would see that I am not always grateful and things don't always work for me. The point is that, finally, I have to empower people, and say, "You have as much to give as I do." Ministry always means to empower others to give their gifts to each other. Ministry is about multiplication. You give away what you have--that little piece of bread in your hand--and it multiplies. You give away the little ministry that you have and everyone becomes a minister to others. Then there is more ministry being done than you have ever seen.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, *It is good for you that I die. If I go then you can do your job.* Jesus' task was to create a community that was empowered. Jesus said, *I will go and I will send my spirit, and my spirit will empower you. All the things the Father told me, I'm telling you. All the things I am doing, you will do, and even greater things.* Jesus never said that he could do something that we couldn't do. He never said that he was something we are not. He said, *I am the son of God, and you are children of God. I am called from death to life and you can do the same. I know everything about the love of God and I hold back nothing from you.* That's the whole concept of the church; we are the body of Christ--we are the living Christ. The sacramental vision of

Christ means that Christ is where we are. Just as Christ went away in order to empower others, every minister has to go away sometimes to empower others. *It's good for you that I die, that I go away so that you can claim the gifts of God. But for awhile I have to be with you so that you can discover your gifts, but then you have to let me go so that they can fully bloom.*

If we go back to that text in Luke, we see that prayer, community, and ministry must all be there as parts of the spiritual life. All three are disciplines. They are a part of discipleship. Yes, first there is a call--to pray, to belong, to care, but a disciple is one who always listens to God, who always is in community among people wherever he or she goes, and who ministers through a compassionate and caring attitude.

That's my vision of what your magazine is all about.

Do you have a parable or illustration of the forgiveness that is essential to community? Can you think of a time where you had to forgive or be forgiven in community? Thinking of forgiveness as the key definition of love in community is different and powerful. In other words, what does forgiveness in community look like?

First of all forgiveness has two qualities: one is to allow yourself to be forgiven, and the other is to forgive others. The first quality is harder than the second. To allow yourself to be forgiven puts you in a dependency situation. If someone says to me, "I want to forgive you for something," I may say back, "But I didn't do anything. I don't need forgiveness. Get out of my life." It's very important that we acknowledge that we are not fulfilling other people's needs and that we need to be forgiven. There is great resistance to that. We come from a culture that is terribly damaged in this area. We find it hard to forgive or ask to be forgiven. If the Pope would just say a few more times in his sermons that the church has been so oppressive over the centuries, it would be such a relief. But we keep trying to defend ourselves. It makes

no sense to defend the Crusades, or to defend Galileo, or to defend the pogroms. Nobody has any need for that. It's not just individuals who need to forgive and be forgiven. We all need to be forgiven. We ask each other to put ourselves in that vulnerable position--and that's when community can be created.

I wrote a whole book about this called *The Inner Voice of Love*, published by Doubleday. Once I got very attached to a person who loved me and I loved that person very deeply. And that person had enormous capability to open up a place in me that had been closed. I became very dependent on that person. In the presence of that person I felt very much alive. At a certain point that person started to realize that my whole life emotionally was centered around that person. Finally, that person could no longer hold on to me. And that person said, "I no longer want to be with you. Whenever I'm with you there is so much pressure. You want to be right with me." So instead of supporting me, I slipped into an incredible depression. I thought, here is a person who really understands and loves me, who brings me in touch with the most important part of myself, and then goes off and drops me like a stone. I just broke down, totally broke down. I was totally paralyzed--I couldn't do ministry, so I left the community. I went to this therapeutic center, and stayed there for four mounths just screaming. I had to gradually forgive that person for not holding on to me--for not being God. I couldn't do it for a long time, I was so angry, so rejected, so repressed. I was in a literal depression. Why should I keep on living when the only person who ever really loved me well thinks I am intolerable to live with? It was an enormous suffering and an extreme opportunity to grow into the core of saying only God can give me what I wanted from this person. I had to forgive this person. It wasn't an intellectual act. I could say it a thousand times but my emotions weren't there. It took me months of immense anguish, suffering, and pain. And the psychiatrist I saw said, "It is very simple, you got infatuated with somebody, that person dropped you, you are depressed, it'll take six months of grieving, be sure you'll never see this person again, and it'll

all be fine. You are normal. On the scale in our psychiatric handbook, your neurosis is a number 2." He treated me like a horse doctor.

He said it would take six months, that I would have to get out of my community, that I never should have been a celibate because I obviously get very attached to people, so it isn't positive. I just didn't buy it. I said to the psychiatrist,"I'm not going to keep seeing you. You have it all figured out, so I'm not going to see you anymore."

I knew that what I experienced was a God-given relationship, that the love was real, that I experienced something that was extremely important, and that I didn't have to leave my community, that I might not have to leave the person, that I would work it through. In the beginning I did not say all that clearly. Finally, when it was all over, I returned home and reestablished contact with that person who by that time realized that I was no longer projecting it all. Now we are very, very good friends.

I don't deny the infatuation part of this crisis; I don't want to make it sound only spiritual, yet it was God's way of calling me to claim my belovedness. To listen to that voice and hear God say *I love you with an unconditional love, with or without that person in you life. You would have come to that person, instead you came to me.*

Could you have forgiven that person if you were not rooted in community?

No, no, no. It was very important that the community supported me, sent me to that therapeutic center, and came to visit me. When that person rejected me I felt rejectable. I generalized it to say, nobody is there. The opposite was that they told me just because this person can no longer be with you doesn't mean we don't love you. We love you a lot. You're very important to us. I didn't believe it at first. I felt their love was very superficial. You don't love me like that person did. I don't think I would have lived it so well without them. And the community wanted me back. And they didn't want to send that other person away.

So many of us feel incapable of forgiving because our communities are so fragmented, so non-existent. The support structures are not there for so many.

More and more I see an interest in spiritual life and prayer for it is so beautiful. There is a lot said about caring for people. But the process of purification is found in community. Community is full of support but it is also hell. You see it in your own kids. Parents are the most important and the most irritating part of their kids' lives.

I sought a community to belong to for many years. I was in university until 1986. Why did I go to L'Arche? I wanted to pray more. I wanted to live in community. I wanted to care for the poor, and all three things didn't seem to happen at Harvard. There was little time or place to pray, community happened only between individuals, and the poor were not to be seen. To be the church is again to pray, to be in contemplation and meditation, to live in community, to care for the poor, and to heal the sick. I'd been looking for a community for a long time; then I found L'Arche and realized I was called there.

Editor's note: Henri planned to return to L'Arche in the late fall and serve this interfaith community as senior pastor. Of his community he said, "We are a Christian community with a very open attitude toward people of other religions. We have Jews and Muslims in the community. We are not trying to find some common denominator. We literally try to help other people live their faith as deeply as they can." He intended to "build a little house in the community." Instead, he was laid to rest next to Adam--his handicapped friend who taught him how important it is to receive the gifts of others.

The Beloved Prayer

ARTHUR LECLAIR

Henri Nouwen calls the baptism in the Jordan "the core experience" of Jesus' life. This author suggests this same biblical event is "a centerpiece moment" that provides a focal point for personal prayer.

I have discovered a form of prayer, in working with myself and others, that has been very enriching. The actual form of the prayer has ancient roots in many traditions. The Desert Fathers and Mothers used such a form in their prayer lives.

I take a passage from the gospel and "massage" the words or events into a prayer. For example, in Mark 1 there is the beautiful story of Jesus' baptism:

> "And a voice came from heaven,
> You are my Son, the Beloved;
> with you I am well pleased."
> (1:11)

This was a centerpiece moment for Jesus and we can reflect on it in the following way, giving ample space for the spirit to inspire us:

1. Sit relaxed and at ease. Have confidence that God's love will show itself in some way. For the first 10 minutes, without fuss, say the

Arthur LeClair directs The Spiritual Life Center and volunteers at Seton House, a hospice in downtown Denver.

following words slowly and fervently:

JESUS, YOU ARE THE BELOVED.

Repeat the words as necessary. Let your heart fill with non-verbal praise and thanksgiving. Let distractions float by, even when they press upon you. After a while the distractions will seem less and less urgent as you let them be. Simply be with Jesus in this precious moment.

2. Then, gently and without fanfare, move on to the next 10 minutes. Paul reminds us in Romans 9:25 that we, too, are destined to become the Beloved. Another color is added to the beauty of this scene:

JESUS, I AM THE BELOVED

Let your core being soak up God's favor. At first, this shift might seem jarring. But rest in the depth of prayer and let this truth settle in.

3. Then go on to the next 10 minutes. I used to imagine that this part would be a distraction, but I have found it to be a rich and holy connection with others.

JESUS, WE (ALL) ARE THE BELOVED.

Let people come into your heart: a neighbor, a friend, a relative, someone you read about in the morning paper. The important thing is not to exclude anyone. Your heart will bring to the surface the ones you need to give attention to.

4. At the end, simply conclude with a word of thanksgiving, or the Lord's Prayer.

This form of prayer can be done individually or in a group. It can

be done on the way to work, in the quiet of early morning, or in the evening before retiring. When we do this as a group, we find that we come out of the depths slowly, and we need a space of silence before we begin speaking again.

Persons who have used this prayer speak about a deep healing that takes place within them. Those who stay with this form of prayer on a regular basis over a period of time seem to live with a clearer understanding of their place in the Universe. □

Robert F. Campbell

A Spirituality Sampler

JOYCE DAVIDSON

These days titles on spirituality and healing line bookstore shelves. Conferences abound on living and dying well. Recently Fellowship in Prayer *asked Joyce Davidson, a local writer, to attend "A Passion for Life" convocation in Minneapolis*

For weeks, I had longingly perused the conference brochure, "A Passion for Life: Re-visioning how we live, heal and die"--a fascinating convocation, including Joan Borysenko, Matthew Fox, Robert Thurman, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Kenneth Ring, Ilana Rubenfeld, David Feinstein, and Medicine Grizzly Bear. "We who enter mid-life today are the pioneers of the second life," announced the materials. "We are engaged in the great adventure of our times--how to encounter our souls and help heal ourselves and the planet." I had recently left a career as a magazine editor to return to graduate school to study psychology and thanatology. What an exciting exploration the conference promised to be, and what a happy coincidence when the call came from the editor, "Could I attend the conference and report on it for *Fellowship in Prayer* readers?" I said yes in a heartbeat. And so here is a completely subjective sampler of one person's experience in such a company.

After a group of Gyuto monks chanted the opening invocation, the first keynote address was delivered by Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi, founder and director of the Spiritual Eldering Project, and author of several books, including *Dream Assembly* and *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*.

Joyce Davidson, former managing editor of Country Inns *magazine, is pursuing her heartfelt passion to accompany people in their time of death.*

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Speaking on "The Elder as Planetary Savior," he celebrated, with homily and humor, the wisdom and teachings of many faiths. "Every well-lived and completed life helps in healing the world," he said, and we must "synthesize the wisdom that comes from life experience, formulating it into a legacy for future generations."

While the rabbi agrees that our culture currently devalues those who have lived long and experienced much, he feels that the responsibility lies in part with the elders. Spending one's retirement years in pursuit of recreation wastes a wealth of experience. Elders could use their experience to advise society on a multitude of social and political problems.

Schachter-Shalomi believes that our nation and the world are currently under-blessed. Likening blessing to nourishment, he said that spiritually we ingest empty calories rather than a suffusing energy that assures growth. "We are so afraid of sectarianism that we don't pray, thereby starving the life energy so crucial to laying the groundwork for future generations."

Youth is programmed to gather information; the elder must be prepared and willing to synthesize it, especially by recognizing the value of adversity. He offered as a model for us all the Dalai Lama, who refers to his persecutors as the "difficult teachers" and regards each experience as neither good nor bad, but whether or not it is useful.

The rabbi concluded by singing "Dona nobis pacem" in several languages, and as his audience of several hundred joined in, in rounds, it became a prayer of such simplicity, reverence, and harmony that it was for me (and for many others, I later learned) the most moving moment of the conference.

* * * * *

Joan Borysenko, author of the groundbreaking bestseller *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* and many other books, is co-founder and former director of the Mind/Body Clinic at New England Deaconess Hospital and was an instructor in Medicine at Harvard Medical School. In her presentations she asked the question, How does the convergence of science and the sacred impact our lives in real ways?

Borysenko focuses on the Native American cosmology of one-heartedness--having a clear, peaceful heart and peace of mind. "When our inside and our outside are compatible it results in truthfulness. When what we care about is what we do, it leads to one-heartedness, peace of mind, and right conduct."

The word for body energy, *chi*, exists in 49 cultures, she tells us, but not in Western culture, where materialism has resulted in our isolation from others and from ourselves. We have embraced scientism, which she defines as "the irrational belief in the rational." The *chi* flows through the body and into the palm of the hand, explaining the possibility of healing by the laying on of hands. If, in fact, energy is primary, then matter precipitates from there, and charismatic healing is possible. According to Borysenko, the miraculous exists and prayer works. It can be quantitatively affirmed.

In her view, those who have experienced unexpected spontaneous remission or healing usually share certain common characteristics: a move toward integrity and authenticity, with clarified values such as love, serenity, and service; a strong belief in possibility; and a spiritual conversion. With the mystical experience the veil thins, but she cautions against narrowness in any approach, urging us not to be a "meditation fundamentalist," emphasizing the importance of openness of both mind and heart.

Borysenko believes that being ill and wishing for a cure rather than for healing and meaning in the larger sense can render the body a battle-ground. Focusing on miracle cures can erode peace of mind and be antithetical to healing. "While healing our lives can often improve health and prolong life, many people heal in the process of dying," she says. So what must a person do to subdue grief? According to Krishna, 'One must perceive death differently, to know that there will never be a moment when we will cease to be.'

* * * * *

Robert Thurman, who chairs the Department of Religion at Columbia University, is one of America's leading scholars of Tibetan

Buddhism and the author and translator of a new edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In his keynote address on contemporary lessons on death and dying from ancient Tibet, Thurman explained that we all have the challenge of developing readiness for the actual separation of mind from body. Tibetan Buddhists believe that one must examine and understand death in order to live fully, and Thurman emphasized the sacredness of all living things within the context of the Buddhist concept of reincarnation.

Immediately after the address, as I stood in line for coffee, I overheard a woman behind me recounting a disturbing experience that she and her friends had had during Thurman's address. Sitting directly in front of them was a woman who had a live, bejeweled beetle pinned to her blouse as decoration. The beetle crawled up the woman's shoulder as far as the gold chain would allow, and she repeatedly picked it up and placed it back on the front of her blouse.

The storyteller and her friends were horrified at the inhumanity of the treatment of the beetle, especially when juxtaposed with the Buddhist reverence for all life being concurrently espoused at the podium. So after the address, one of them asked the beetle-wearer, "Doesn't it seem cruel to you to keep that creature on a chain?" She responded, "No more cruel than taking my dog for a walk on a leash." They were astounded at her callousness, and another of them said to her, "Well, I hope you're kept on a leash in your next life."

"That's amazing!" said the woman in the coffee line that she was telling the story to. "What did she say to that?"

"Oh, nothing. She just didn't get it."

* * * * *

Kenneth Ring, professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut and a renowned researcher of the near-death experience (NDE), discussed the nature of NDEs and how they have altered our modern view of death. His presentation focused on how the information gathered from thousands of experiencers can be used in working with the dying and bereaved, and on how it can affect the way all of us live every day.

Touching briefly on the most common aspects of the NDE, such as the out-of-body experience, the tunnel, bright light, and profound sense of well-being, Ring's emphasis here was primarily on the life review--that point at which some experiencers say they are brought face to face with every thought, word, and deed of their lives. One of the most commonly reported aspects of the life review is that one re-experiences the event from the point of view of others involved. For example, an angry response or dishonest act that hurt someone else is relived from the other person's perspective, including actually experiencing that person's pain and hurt. But almost everyone reports that they had no sense that they were being judged by anyone else. There was no sense of external recrimination. The judgment came strictly from within themselves.

Ring believes the life review has practical value for us all, encouraging us to make positive behavioral choices, knowing that one day we will all go through a life review, experiencing the feelings of those we come into contact with every day.

* * * * *

Next was David Feinstein's workshop, "Spark of Spirit, Creature of Earth: The Human Dilemma." Feinstein is a clinical psychologist, author, and director of Inner Source in Ashland, Oregon. This interactive workshop dealt with the debate that rages within us all about what happens after we die. In facing death, the biological self is fighting and grieving, while our larger self, the dimension of our existence that transcends the body, is on a totally different journey. We are unique in our ability to ponder our own mortality, and it can be a blessing or a curse.

Workshop participants were asked to pair up with someone sitting near us to explore together both aspects of human nature in order to learn how to "foster a creative dialectic between them." I paired up with a woman sitting near me named Linda, and as we sat cross-legged on the floor, we told each other about our experiences with the deaths of loved ones, and our greatest fears about death.

Linda, a soft-spoken woman, is a nurse who works with mothers who have recently lost newborn babies. She struck me as a tender-hearted person as she recounted her daily struggle to help grieving mothers find meaning in the abbreviated lives of tiny souls. I told her about my tremendous grief after my mother's death. With tears in her eyes, she told me about the wonderful Brazilian woman who had been her "mother" during a year in Brazil as a high-school exchange student. Linda had always hoped to visit her again and to let her know how much she had meant to her, but the woman had died recently, and now Linda agonized over whether she would have a second chance to see her.

Tom Dunham

She wept as she told me about her nine-year-old niece and godchild who had been killed in a car wreck a few months earlier. In the midst of her own great grief and loss, she wanted to help the child's mother, her sister, find meaning in the child's precious, truncated life.

When the workshop ended, Linda asked what table I had chosen for the networking luncheon to follow. (The day before, we had been asked

to write on a topic that we were interested in on a card and were then grouped with people with similar interests for lunch.) I told her I had chosen the near-death experience.

Throughout the course of lunch Linda and I began to get acquainted with Roberta, who struck me as a person of deep, quiet grace. I asked her if she had ever had a near-death experience. She told me that she had had an out-of-body experience during a serious illness at the age of 12. Though she didn't believe she had been near death, she described the experience in great detail, including what the room and her parents looked like from overhead (she noticed that her mother had not dusted the top of a tall chest) before she was "sucked back into" her body.

She said it had been a completely pleasant experience and that its significance for her was primarily the comfort it had given her years later in the wake of the sudden death of her seven-year-old son who was hit by a car. Linda's ears perked up. For the rest of the luncheon, Roberta and Linda were involved in an intense discussion about the sudden loss of a child, the overwhelming grief, the struggle for meaning, memory, and peace.

As Linda prepared to get up from the table, I turned to say goodbye to her and noticed for the first time that on her busily-patterned blouse was a beetle and that it was moving. I realized with a jolt who she was. I almost said nothing, but before she stood up, I said, "Linda, I just noticed your beetle pin is alive! Tell me about it."

She explained that it was an ancient species from Central and South America, and that the Mayans had considered them to be sacred and wore them for decoration. The two jewels were attached with an organic, animal-friendly glue, and Linda kept it in a container specially designed for it, carefully tending and feeding it. She had owned it for about a year and a half and wore it once or twice a week; it gave her great comfort.

"You know, I've gotten some really negative reactions about this from people here today," she said. "After Robert Thurman's address this morning some women were really outraged and said they thought I was being cruel and that I should have to be on a leash in my next life."

I said nothing of my having overheard the women. I had found that this woman who they thought was so uncaring was instead a sensitive midwife to those in grief.

* * * * *

The morning after the conference, as I checked out of the hotel, a woman behind the desk named Yatta saw on the form that I was with *Fellowship in Prayer* and said, "Oh, please say a special prayer for me. I could really use it." She went on to explain that prayer is an integral part of her life and her daily routine. "I begin every day with Psalm 121, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help,'" she said, "and if I don't do it for a day or two I can feel myself getting out of sync." She reached out and took my hand and looked straight into my eyes with openness and love as we talked about the importance of prayer in our flawed, everyday lives. And as I left, she called after me, "I'll say a prayer for you, too."

All the way home, and many times since, I've thought of Yatta and Linda and Roberta and what they taught me, without ever knowing it, about sacredness, interconnectedness, and one-heartedness, and I realized that, however edifying the workshops and lectures, the most powerful lessons had been the unintentional ones of pure example. □

What Jesus Means to Me

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI

What does a devout Hindu have to say about Jesus? Gandhi read the Bible while studying law in London and was profoundly moved by the Sermon on the Mount. Later in South Africa a fellow lawyer took him to a revival meeting where the commitment to prayer compelled him. Gandhi recalled from this period, "I have remained forever indebted to them for the religious quest they awakened in me. I shall always cherish the memory of their contact. The years that followed had more, not less, of such sweet and sacred contacts in store for me." Here we read his distilled thoughts on Jesus.

Although I have devoted a large part of my life to the study of religion and to discussion with religious leaders of all faiths, I know very well that I cannot but seem presumptuous in writing about Jesus Christ and trying to explain what he means to me. I do so only because my Christian friends have told me on more than a few occasions that, for the very reason that I am not a Christian and that (I shall quote their words exactly) "I do not accept Christ in the bottom of my heart as the only Son of God," it is impossible for me to understand the profound significance of his teachings, or to know and interpret the greatest source of spiritual strength that man has ever known.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) is remembered as the man who led a non-violent revolution, first in South Africa and later in India. He was assassinated at the age of seventy-eight.

Reprinted from What Jesus Means to Me, *Navajivan Publishing House, 1959, 9-11.*

Athough this may or may not be true in my case, I have reasons to believe that it is an erroneous point of view. I believe that such an estimate is incompatible with the message that Jesus Christ gave to the world. For he was, certainly, the highest example of One who wished to give everything, asking nothing in return, and not caring what creed might happen to be professed by the recipient. I am sure that if he were living here now among men, he would bless the lives of many who perhaps have never even heard his name, if only their lives embodied the virtues of which he was a living example on earth; the virtues of loving one's neighbor as oneself and of doing good and charitable works among one's fellow men.

What, then, does Jesus mean to me? To me, he was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had. To his believers, he was God's only begotten son. Could the fact that I do or do not accept this belief make Jesus have any more or less influence in my life? Is all the grandeur of his teaching and of his doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so. To me it implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key of his nearness to God; that he expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see him and recognize him as the son of God. But I do believe that something of this spirit that Jesus exemplified in the highest measure, in its most profound human sense, does exist. I must believe this; if I did not believe it I should be a skeptic; and to be a skeptic is to live a life that is empty and lacks moral content. Or, what is the same thing, to condone the entire human race to a negative end.

It is true that there certainly is reason for skepticism when one observes the bloody butchery that European aggressors have unloosed, and when one thinks about the misery and suffering prevalent in every corner of the world, as well as the pestilence and famine that always follow, terribly and inevitably, upon war. In the face of this, how can one speak seriously of the divine spirit incarnate in man? Because these acts of terror and murder offend the conscience of man; because man

knows that they represent evil; because, in the inner depths of his heart and of his mind, he deplores them. And because, moreover, when he does not go astray, misled by false teachings or corrupted by false leaders, man has within his breast an impulse for good and a compassion that is the spark of divinity, and which some day, I believe, will burst forth into the full flower that is the hope of all mankind. An example of this flowering may be found in the figure and in the life of Jesus. I refuse to believe that there now exists or has ever existed a person that has not made use of Jesus' example to lessen his sins, even though he may have done so without realizing it. The lives of all have, in some greater or lesser degree, been changed by his presence, his actions, and the words spoken by his divine voice.

I believe that it is impossible to estimate the merits of the various religions of the world, and moreover I believe that it is unnecessary and harmful even to attempt it. But each one of them, in my judgment, embodies a common motivating force: the desire to uplift man's life and give it purpose. And because the life of Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded I believe that he belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world; to all races and people, it matters little under what flag, name, or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a God inherited from their ancestors. □

Illuminations

And Mary said, "Here Am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me, according to your word."

Luke 1:38

Pray, pray, pray with all your strength. In prayer is the solution for every situation.

Our Lady, Fatima, 1917

Although others before her strove for love,/ Men could best understand it through her./ She observed the law and family traditions,/But paid no heed to rewards, threats, praise, or laments. So she left all for the sake of her unique Beloved./Justly then did Love exalt her,/When Love made her the Mother of Love.

Hadewijch of Antwerp

In every mosque in the world, the Mihrah, or prayer niche in the eastern wall of the mosque, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It is a shame that more Christians do not know this. Mary is the perfect woman, complete in herself, being the perfect matrix, the perfect receptacle from which Jesus could be born.

Shaikh Hamid

Mary said, "How shall a son be born to me, when no man has touched me?" He said: "Allah creates what he pleases; when he has decreed something. He only says to it BE, and it is."

Koran Surat 4

Eryk Hanut, co-author with Andrew Harvey of a new, beautifully illustrated book, Mary's Vineyard, Daily Meditation, Readings, and Revelations, *dedicates his introduction to Mary Ford-Grabowsky, former editor of* Fellowship in Prayer. *Selections are reprinted by permission of Quest Books, P.O. Box 270, Wheaton, Il 60189-0270. Mary is now the vice president of the Institute for Creation Spirituality in Oakland, California.*

How Far To Bethlehem

ANITA WHEATCROFT

Bethlehem is a geographical place fraught with significance for Christians, Moslems, and Jews. This author, seeking the true meaning of the Nativity of Jesus, looks inward to find the ways that our hearts can become places of welcome for the coming Christ, just as Bethlehem provided simple shelter for his birth so long, long ago.

Please send the story of your own "transforming experience" to the Editor, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542. You need not be a professional writer.

Some years ago, a caroling choir of children--wide-eyed innocents--sang the words *How far to Bethlehem? Not very far*. This question set me to wondering about what this birthplace of Jesus can mean for us today.

Bethlehem sits six miles south of Jerusalem. The name Bethlehem means "house of bread," doubtlessly due to its location in a fertile valley of grain fields. Originally called *Eprath*, it is mentioned in the Bible as the place where Rachel, wife of Jacob, was buried. Later, fortified and rebuilt, it was the birthplace of David, the shepherd boy who became king. About three hundred years after Christ, Constantine and his

A published author and frequent contributor to Fellowship in Prayer, *Anita Wheatcroft lives in The Woodlands, Texas.*

family were converted to Christianity and his mother, Helena, had a church built at the supposed site of Jesus' birth and called it the Church of the Nativity. Thousands of tourists and pilgrims visit it every year.

Today, Bethlehem is not very far from the daily news. This tiny town has been and is still a battleground, an armed camp, a center of controversy between Moslems, Christians, and Jews who each hold it sacred for their own religious and political reasons.

Knowing these things about the town called Bethlehem, birthplace of Jesus, I tried to discern what this little town has to teach us about this season--so often a season of materialism, selfishness, and vainglory. How could I retrace my steps and get back on the road and help others to honor this holy season as God would like?

My prayer is that each of us this Advent will remember Jesus' welcome, His acceptance of us, so that we may accept others in His name.

While I pondered these things an early memory came to my mind. It happened in a large church in New York City where I grew up. During an annual Nativity pageant, the church was especially full. Dark and hushed, the congregation watched the lighting of the candles. Toward the back, I sat, one timid little girl, with my family. Newly moved to the city after a family separation and trauma, life had settled down for me, but I was still overwhelmed and homesick for my grandparents and familiar friends. That night, however, caught up in awe as organ music rolled out from balcony to rafters, I heard a familiar story I loved, and was transported to another time and place. Down the aisle swept a colorful procession as the lights went up, revealing the magnificent manger scene. Travelers, bearded shepherds, and finally

the three kings bearing gifts advanced majestically. Before anyone knew it, I found myself following them.

The journey down that long aisle was an early spiritual pilgrimage for me, yet it felt like a kind of homecoming. When I reached the manger scene, there was a sleepy donkey, real sheep, and Mary and Joseph beneath an angel with outstretched wings. Above all, there was a light in the manger, enfolding us in its glow. Kneeling in front of it, I had a sense of exaltation, of self-offering as real as any I have ever known since. This was real to me, and I was there. Of course, it didn't last long. I was lifted to my feet by an usher and carried down the aisle, back to my embarrassed family, and the pageant swept on. I was vaguely aware of subdued smiles, and my parent's whispered scolding didn't matter. My discovery was my own, and I had something now that no one could ever take from me. *I had been to Bethlehem.* I had seen it all for the first time and would never forget.

This early experience inspired me to later work in a tenement church in a poor section of New York City. For three years, I produced simple Christmas pageants we hoped would recreate the incomparable Nativity story. I hoped these children and their parents, who had little beauty in their lives, would be inspired anew by this story from our heritage. Over the years, as a minister's wife, I've produced many a Christmas pageant--living tableaus enacting the story of the Gospels.

My prayer is that each of us this Advent will remember Jesus' welcome to us. He accepts us, just as we are, so that we may accept others in His name. May our hearts not be as crowded inns, but places of peace, swept clean and made ready once again for Him to come to us and live in us. □

A Tire Iron Parable

R. BRUCE MCPHERSON

This parable was first circulated with the author's Christmas cards. The response from friends was overwhelming. Now it is offered to our readers as an urban dweller's prayer.

One morning in early November I was driving north on the Dan Ryan Expressway toward the Loop in our relatively new car, alone with my thoughts and National Public Radio. Suddenly my right rear tire exploded. I managed, somehow, to work my way to the left lane and then onto the narrow shoulder of the dangerous roadway, just south of 63rd Street. I climbed carefully out of the car to assess my situation. Cars whirled by at what now were frightening speeds, only six or eight feet from me. I opened the trunk to discover, to my horror, that the full-sized spare tire apparently had not been inflated and that the tire iron was missing. Why hadn't I checked more carefully when I purchased the car? But now it was too late. I was in a proverbial pickle. Towing would be my only resort. I tied my handkerchief to the radio aerial and eased my way back into the car to wait. I wasn't sure what would happen next.

The first car that stopped--no easy task on this section of highway, where one must pull over, stop, and then back up for at least a hundred yards down a perilous shoulder--was driven by a young African-American woman. I explained my situation. She said, "I still have some time before I have to be at work. I'll get off and call a tow truck for you." I thanked her, and she was gone. A second car with a rescuer was driven

Bruce McPherson is recently retired from the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

by a young African-American man. I explained that help was on the way, or at least I thought so. "Thanks anyway." He grinned and headed back into the wicked traffic.

The third car that stopped was driven by a burly young African-American man in a leather jacket; he looked like a linebacker, but there was a gentleness in his eyes that was impossible to miss. He assessed the situation with me. "I have a spare," he said. I was dumbfounded. He was offering me his spare. So, together, working with his jack and tire irons, we removed my destroyed tire, sharing the roadside danger together. But his spare was too small to fit on my car. He asked, "Is your spare flat or does it just need air?" I said that I thought it was the latter. "I'll go get some air in it for you," he said matter-of-factly, moving quickly and confidently, leaving his jack and tools with me. Off he drove. Ten minutes later he was back. "You're right, all it needed was air." He quickly placed the spare on my car, and I was ready to move again.

"What goes around comes around." I have heard my African-American friends and colleagues use this phrase over the years. Never did the words have so much meaning.

With the November wind (better known in Chicago as The Hawk) biting us and the sounds of traffic cascading around us, I found myself a bit tongue-tied. "I can't thank you enough. Can I reimburse you for your time and trouble? Is there something I can do?"

"Yeah. Send me a Christmas card," my hero said, with a touch of a smile on his strong face.

A city tow truck pulled up across the highway. Recognizing that I was in good hands and about to continue my journey, the driver moved on down the road. I like to think that the young woman's phone call was successful.

I found a pen and a piece of paper, and as he was writing down his name and address, I remarked, "You are really a good Samaritan."

His eyes caught mine. For the first time there was a musing quality to his voice. "I haven't heard that story mentioned in a long time." He threw his jacket and tools into his car trunk, and he was away. Within minutes I was continuing my trip north, shaken but moving--and moved, too, to reflection and gratitude.

What is worth noting at Christmastide is this reaching out of three citizens to help another in distress, across the constraints of age and race in a city that often makes these variables divisive. As I neared the Loop, I thought of how insignificant public policy is without the capacity of human beings to make life in a city civilized and moral and satisfying.

An older white man was in trouble. Three young African-Americans came to him with assistance--simply because they are good people, and a fellow human being needed their help. There, for an hour, at the edge of the Dan Ryan Expressway, the city was not in trouble. It worked for all of us in ways that I still struggle to understand fully, but for which I am enormously grateful.

"What goes around comes around." I have heard my African-American friends and colleagues use this phrase over the years. Never did the words have so much meaning. I must redouble my efforts to reach out, too, to my fellow citizens and neighbors who are African-American and Hispanics, when I can be the rescuer rather than the rescued.

That year I sent my Good Samaritan a humorous Christmas card. It displayed a car with a Christmas tree on top and a dog sitting in the driver's seat. I felt I had to send a card that involved an auto. I wished him well.

A few days before Christmas a card from him arrived in my mailbox. Inside the card I read this verse from Ecclesiastes,

"Two are better than one; they receive a good reward for their toil, because if one falls, the other can help his companion up again; but alas for the man who falls alone with no partner to help him up." (NEB)

It turns out my Good Samaritan is a Christian and a nurse. I began to wonder if the hands of God were on my shoulders. Perhaps that windy November day my car was not on the road to Chicago, but rather toward my own Damascus. □

Cliff Moore

Snow Days as Spiritual Practice

SHEILA MORGAN

Snow Days are synonymous with emancipation from work, from school, from routine. This author writes, "Snow falls. Time slows." She encourages us to attentively enjoy the pause life hands us.

No matter what religion or teacher you are drawn to, several spiritual practices continue throughout the ages. To enter the Kingdom of Heaven, to follow the path of the Tao, to find the Pearl, or to Awaken, we are repeatedly advised to: *Accept what is. Let go of what isn't. Stay in the present. Become as a child. Love your neighbor.* Snow days offer a splendid opportunity to practice all of these.

The first and best thing about snow days is that they are out of control. Mother Nature has taken over the reins and, although to our deluded eyes she seems to be trying to do us in, she is actually taking good care of us. She is giving us blanket permission to be off--off from work, off from school, off from meetings, appointments, classes, workouts at the gym, buying, selling, marketing, and the endless errands. We're off from being perpetually responsible. It takes a while to understand it. At first we keep pressing ahead, trying to bend destiny into our own expectations, unable to believe that Mother Nature has dared to throw a monkey wrench into our ego-driven plans, but little by little it begins to dawn on us. Since we can't get the car out, the trains and busses aren't running, the flights are canceled, and the

Sheila Morgan lives on Martha's Vineyard and works as a psychotherapist with individuals, couples and groups. Sheila's work has appeared in FiP *before.*

store is closed, whatever important things we thought we must do will simply have to wait. We're off the hook. We can't change this. We're not in charge. When we finally let go and surrender to the snow day, very good things begin to happen.

I suppose some people, finding themselves snowbound, set about cleaning closets and basements. However, the general feeling in the air is that we've all got permission to play and most of us, being starved for this, find it irresistible and jump right in. It helps to have children around. If you don't have any, it's a good idea to find some. This is a perfect day for seeing the world change through a child's eyes.

Years ago, when I was raising children a snow day meant that everyone had permission to have fun. You didn't send the children and dogs out while you stayed in and worked as usual; you went out to play and have fun, too. Whether you slid down hills on Flexible Flyers or cardboard boxes, built snowmen or forts, made angels or snow balls, you always went outdoors to play. Then when you came in with your blood zinging, your cheeks rosy, feeling fresh and happy, it was time to make a fire, toast marshmallows, have some hot chocolate, maybe play Monopoly or Go Fish with the kids. It was a day for making bread, soup, or cookies--not because you had to but because you wanted to--or if the stove was out, for seeing how many meals you could create with peanut butter. It was always a day for treats, not as rewards, but just for the fun of it. Snow days were for walking in the middle of the road backwards, for coloring outside the lines, for becoming a child again.

Snow days push us into the present. Recently a storm left me without phone or electricity. Suddenly my global world miraculously narrowed to just what I could see outside my window and as far as I was able to walk. I caught a glimpse of how it must have been to live before phones, TV and radio when the only news you received was brought in person, when your entire daily world was made up of whatever was in front of you, and you lived in your body instead of your mind. My own compressed world forced me to focus on the particular and immediate.

Cliff Moore

My usual concerns--phone calls to return, mail to get off, business to complete, how to get from here to there, even my worries about how some men in Washington in dark blue suits were running my country--were suddenly irrelevant. Today what demanded my attention was my body and what I must do *now* to eat and keep warm. After that I could let the day unfold by itself, tending to each moment as it presented itself to be lived. The most ordinary things I had taken as my due, like food and warmth, were suddenly enormous blessings.

Not many of us live in the present anymore. Hurtling down the super highway in our super-fast cars with our super-fast faxes and e-mail and v-mails and Fedex overnights, we are seduced by the fast track.

Why all this hurry? Are we all trying to reach each other faster than ever before because our separation is so great that we can't bear it another minute? Or are we just a bunch of spoiled brats who want what we want immediately? I fear it's worse than that. With too many things on our plates we often fall behind schedule, become overwhelmed, so we

turn to the rush route. I, for one, seem chronically short of time. Recently I wanted to get a package to my friend, Jonathan, before he left on a trip. So I sent it by Fedex for $20.00 instead of regular mail for $3.00. My mind had not been quiet enough to see clearly, to plan ahead, so I was late. Although I felt a kind of thrill, like a naughty kid skidding in under the wire, my New England conscience said it smacked of waste, self indulgence, and just plain bad planning. Snow days covered the fast track with snow.

Snow falls. Time slows. Suddenly left to walk instead of drive, we are stunned by the exquisite world around us. We become drunk on beauty. The constant pressure to get somewhere is lifted and that stingy tyrant Time turns suddenly generous making the hours feel longer and more spacious. There's time to stop and have a neighborly chat, to savor an extra cup of coffee, or to "shoot the breeze" with strangers in the post office. We're all suddenly on the same side, trading snow stories, lending equipment and helping each other dig out. It's easy to love your neighbors when you realize they and you are one and the same.

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Snow falls. Time slows. It stretches to allow us to connect more deeply and sweetly with loved ones who live in our own houses, but who often get what's left after our busy schedules. I remember one storm when we had no lights. I lit candles and read aloud to my son who, at that time, although young, was long past being read to and thought TV

was the only way to go. I don't remember what I read, but he listened attentively to every word and when I finished he said, "Gee, Mom, that was cool. We should do this all the time." He was right, it was cool. We needed each other to make reading aloud into a magic moment. Soon the lights returned and Time sped up again.

If you play a tape recorder on fast forward you can't really hear the music as it was written. You can, if you know the music well enough, hear the melody, but actually it's your memory of the music that you hear. It's like skipping quickly over the top of it. Today we do that with our lives. Somehow, while we weren't paying attention, our lives inched up to fast forward. Now we hear only an outline of the melody and can no longer resonate to the deep rich texture of the music as it was intended. Snow days press the pause button. The music stops and for a short blessed time you remember the gifts: that you are alive and breathing, that you love and are loved, that the only moment is now and it shimmers with the grandeur and grace of God. For a short blessed time you enter the Mystery. Then, if you are very wise, you can slowly, humbly, press the play button and, giving your careful attention to each moment, gratefully begin, once again, to fully hear the music of your own life. □

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